

An Altogether Different Council Day Experience Means a Change in Spring Routines

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NBTA Staff Officer



The birds chirping outside my window suggest that spring is not far away. A change in season can also signal us to look forward to the many routines and activities that traditionally come with it, and here at NBTA, spring means that our May Council Day is not far away.

Our collective agreement guarantees that our teacher members organize three days of the 195 in our school year for their professional colleagues. Routinely, one of those days occurs on the first Friday in May and is known as “NBTA Council Day.” (The remaining two days take place in August - one is school-based, your NBTA Branch Professional Learning Committee organizes the other.)

Thirty-six teachers from around the province volunteer to make these events a reality by serving on your NBTA Elementary, Middle Level and High School Council. Each Council Executive comprises 12 teachers who govern and make decisions on behalf of their respective members. (Interested in becoming a Council Executive member and having a say in next year’s event? See page 14 or www.nbta.ca for more information on our Council Annual Meetings and the nominations process to be elected to one of our three Council Executives.) They are always on the lookout for new members to join them with fresh ideas!

This year, our Council Day takes place on Friday, May 7th. The planning and decisions for any spring Council Day take place almost a year in advance. Since predicting what our New Brunswick public health situation would look like in May 2021 was impossible back in September, your Councils applied two approaches to all of their deliberations that I believe showed much wisdom:

1. *Plan for the worst, hope for the best* - While your Councils certainly understood that we would all be more than a little tired of screens and virtual meetings by now, they also knew that health and safety must be the first priority. As you may have already heard, this year will be our first-ever **virtual** Council Day, and as such, it is billed as an ‘*Altogether Different*’ theme and format. The day has been designed so that regardless of the public health status or ‘colour’ we find ourselves provincially on May 7th, all teachers can easily access the learning from their classroom computers, therefore, assuring that they can be physically distanced and yet, connected to their colleagues around the province.
2. *When in doubt, apply the K.I.S.S. Principle* – Councils predicted that everything we would do this school year would be more

complex than usual. Given this belief, they insisted a ‘*KEEP IT SIMPLE, SMARTY*’ (KISS principle) be applied. *Should we have a virtual social like our sister organization in PEI?* No, keep it simple. *Should we set up multiple Zoom links for networking and have many smaller divided sessions?* No, keep it simple. *Should we look at more virtual providers with many bells and whistles to compare and contrast virtual conference options?* No, our teachers have used the WHOVA platform before...keep it simple!

A one-click keynote experience

The result of their deliberations provides a solid program. Our ‘Main Bowl’ link option will allow teachers to log in first thing in the morning for our opening ceremonies and simply remain for the day to listen to five keynotes with general K-12 appeal without having to touch their computer keyboard again. This link is intended to mimic the experience one might have on Combined Council Day if a teacher simply chooses to remain in the Moncton Coliseum’s Main Bowl.

Should teachers wish to mix it up a little more, there are options for more interactive workshops by logging into sessions individually. Some of those workshops may have limited capacity and will be on a ‘first come, first served’ basis. All sessions will be accessed using the WHOVA App platform that had received positive feedback from teachers when we used it for Combined Council Day in 2014 and 2019. (Stay tuned for more detailed instructions after April 1st.)

No alternate proposal process

It is also thanks to the KISS principle that your NBTA Executive Committee voted to suspend our alternate proposal process for this year since the event’s virtual nature should allow for every member to participate, therefore making the policy null and void.

What if a teacher doesn’t find something of interest in our virtual Council Day program?

For this year, teachers are welcome to take part in *any virtual professional learning opportunity* they find as long as it is an *individually* motivated endeavour (you decide for you) that, when scrutinized, could easily be linked to a personal, professional learning need. You must also be prepared to **share the link/information** about the learning in our ‘NBTA Council Day’ reflection survey so that your professional association can proudly share our members’ varied professional interests with our employer. **No pre-approved alternate proposal process is required.**

“We can’t be creative if we refuse to be confused. Change always starts with confusion; cherished interpretations must dissolve to make way for what’s new. Great ideas and inventions miraculously appear in the space of not knowing.”

~ Margaret J. Wheatley

Will anything be ‘routine’ this year?

While we are sure there will be many adjustments given this year’s unique context, your councils hope you will see some things remain unchanged:

1. We hope that teachers will agree that the quality of professional learning that takes place on Friday, May 7th is of the highest standard.
2. **No NBTA monies** can be accessed for activities scheduled on the same day(s) as NBTA Council. Should you choose to register for another virtual learning event on that day, please do not apply for NBTA funding.
3. The traditional **Council Day Evaluation** will also be extremely important this year as a virtual format could result in a preferred format for some teachers. These thoughts and opinions would be necessary for future Councils to consider as they plan forward.

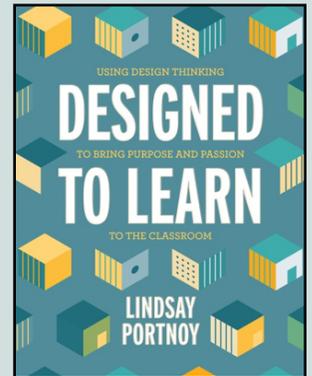
On your behalf, I would like to thank your council colleagues who have devoted numerous volunteer hours to make sure your professional association is able to offer a quality professional learning day on Friday, May 7, 2021.

Take care,



Book Give Away:

Congratulations to last month’s winners Trevor Terry of Riverview Middle School and Lucy Leblanc of Glen Falls School. A copy of *“Student Learning Communities: A Springboard for Academic & Social-emotional Development”* by D. Fisher, N. Frey & J. Almarode is on the way to you via snail mail. Thank you to all who made time to enter!



Up for grabs, this month is a copy of *“Designed to Learn: Using Design Thinking to Bring Purpose and Passion to the Classroom”* by Lindsay Portnoy. Sound intriguing? Send me an email at ardith.shirley@nbta.ca with ‘Book Draw’ as the subject line!

Works Consulted:

Wheatley, M. J. (2002). *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.